

Final Draft Report -  
November 5, 2018

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# Avent Ferry

## Corridor Study

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CITY PLANNING



Raleigh





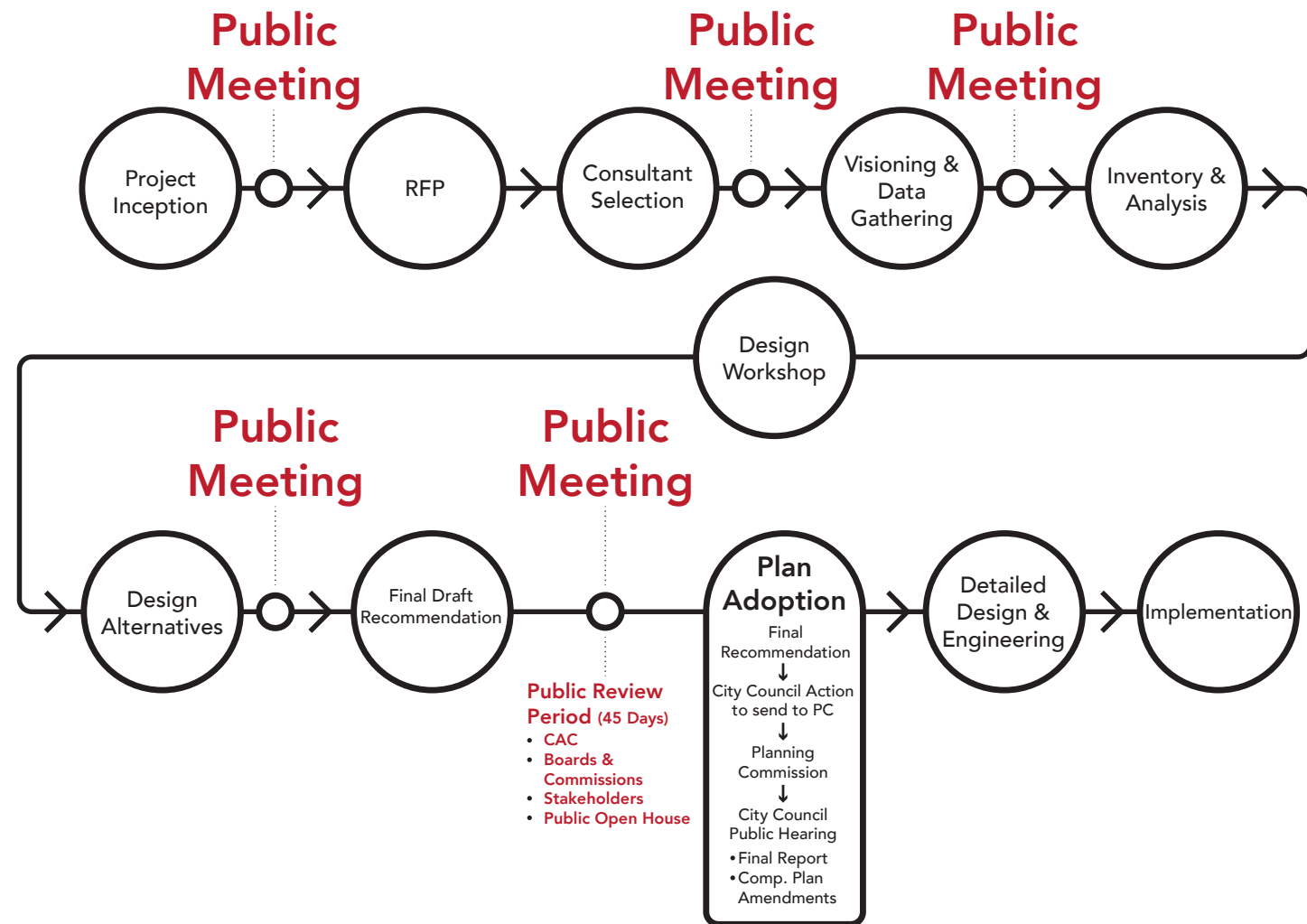
## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The objective of the Avent Ferry Road visioning workshops and meetings was to develop a vision for both the character of the public realm and future adjacent land uses. The information gathered from the workshops contributes to a framework of data, observations and community input used to generate corridor concept designs and ultimately a single cohesive corridor vision. Participants were asked to identify assets, issues, and opportunities. The full record of the workshops is on the UDC web site.

A highly interactive public engagement process was undertaken to ensure recommendations outlined in this report are consistent with community goals and aspirations for the corridor. The process began with a March 2016 Visioning Workshop where the community's initial thoughts were expressed related to notable issues and possible improvements needed in the corridor. This meeting was followed up with a March 2017 kick-off meeting that asked for detailed information regarding specific locations where improvements could be made. Following this meeting, the design team and Urban Design Center (UDC) conducted many focus group meetings with key landowners, NCSU, and City departments to understand their specific needs and interests.







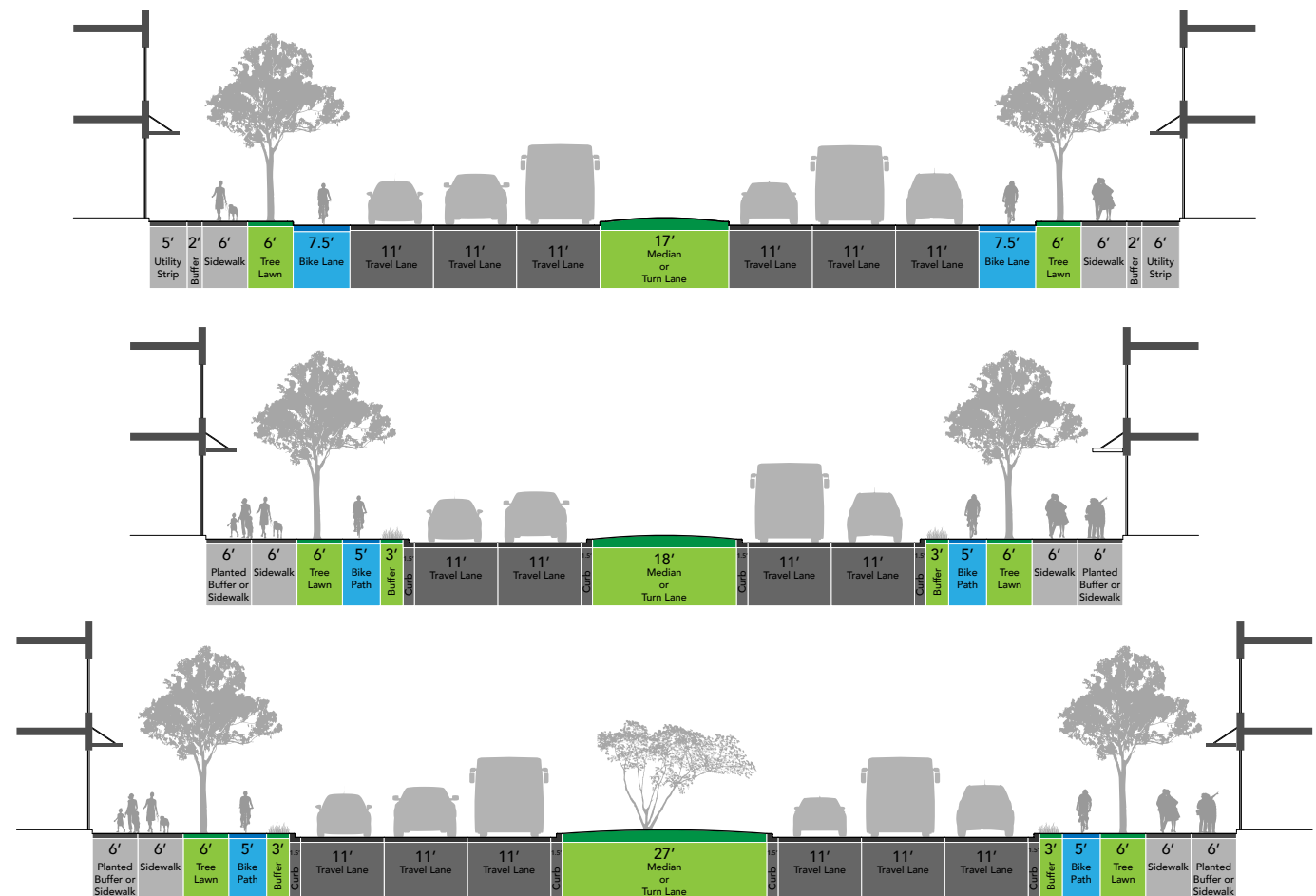
The information gathered by these efforts was then analyzed and presented as a list of needs and potential options for improvement at a multi-day design workshop held at Mission Valley Shopping Center. At this workshop, stakeholders helped develop land use concepts for the Mission Valley and Avent Ferry Shopping Centers. Participants proposed greenway, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements and studied various street configurations.

Throughout the process, an online polling website was available for residents to provide further comment and respond to design proposals. Additionally, The UDC maintained ongoing outreach and provided regular updates to the Raleigh Citizen Advisory Committee, appointed boards and commissions as well as City Council.

The design team synthesized the feedback received through these pathways and, combined with their own analysis, developed multiple scenarios that tested alternate approaches to lane configurations, connectivity, transit options and urban form. The design team also used results of the analysis to narrow the test cases to just a few plausible development scenarios. Two Public Workshops were then held in October 2017 to test the viability of each scenario. Participants provided their opinions on the pros and cons of each alternative. In March 2018 a Design Alternative meeting was held to solicit additional input on design work completed since the previous public workshop. The Design Team then worked with City staff to distill the feedback into the recommendations presented in this report. These recommendations are the best balance between cost, practicality, and positive impact on the corridor.

## Kick-off Meeting

In March 2017, a public meeting was held to kick off the analysis and design phase of the project. The objective was to present initial findings and introduce the design team to the community. The record of input received at the kick-off meeting may be accessed via the UDC web site. Data and user opinions were collected through a variety of methods including written comments, instant polling, and issue-oriented table discussions.



Preferred sections as a result of the Kick-Off Meeting



# Public Design Workshop

In October 2017, a public meeting was held to facilitate input during the design phase of the project. The objective was to present analysis and obtain feedback on the vision for the corridor, specifically related to pedestrian/cyclist/transit/automobile circulation, access to Lake Johnson, and Mission Valley and Aventura Shopping Centers. Data and user opinions were collected through a variety of methods including written comments, issue-oriented table discussions, and a street cross-section visioning exercises. Highlights of the workshop include:

- The most referenced issue was improving pedestrian and bicycle safety. The corridor presents both real and perceived threats to cyclists and pedestrians. Continuous bicycle lanes are inconsistent and narrow drive lanes cause conflicts between bicycles and cars. A high number of curb-cuts (driveways) present dangerous conflict points for both cyclists and pedestrians. Many sidewalks are narrow, broken, and often directly contiguous with the street. Some sections of the corridor lack sidewalks on one or both sides. Due to long distances between crosswalks, many pedestrians resort to crossing mid-block in often heavy traffic conditions. This safety issue was brought up frequently. There is also a need voiced for additional greenway connections.
- Residents desire a safer and more efficient public transit system. Despite being the most-used transit corridor in the City, quality bus stops are conspicuously absent. With the exception of a few small shelters, comfortable waiting facilities are deficient. Many attendees complained that bus stops created congestion and conflict with automobile traffic. Residents suggested dedicated bus lanes and bus pullouts be considered.

## WEB SURVEY

**WHAT ARE SOME QUICK FIXES THAT COULD BE DONE RIGHT AWAY TO IMPROVE THE AREA?**



- BIKE LANES
- REDUCE SPEED LIMIT
- INCREASED SPEED LIMIT ENFORCEMENT
- MORE CROSSWALKS
- PLANTED MEDIAN/ROAD DIET
- CREATE A COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT
- CREATE BRANDING FOR AREA
- MURAL PROGRAM
- WIDEN SIDEWALKS
- WIDEN AVENT FERRY NEAR ATHENS DRIVE HIGH SCHOOL
- REPAVE SURFACE

(14 RESPONSES)

## WHAT ARE THE BIG ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE FIXED ALONG THE CORRIDOR?



- IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING SAFETY
- ENCOURAGE MIXED-USE, URBAN DEVELOPMENT
- INSTALL BUS BUMP-OUTS
- IMPROVE TRANSIT FUNCTIONALITY
- SLOW CAR TRAFFIC
- MAKE AREA MORE BIKEABLE
- REDUCE ROAD WIDTH
- REDUCE AMOUNT OF IMPERVIOUS SURFACE
- ENCOURAGE WALKING, CYCLING AND TRANSIT
- BEAUTIFY THE AREA
- PRESERVE TREE CANOPY AND NATURAL AREAS
- IMPROVE MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY IN COMMERCIAL AREAS

(9 RESPONSES)

- Reducing the speed limit and incorporating traffic calming devices were common suggestions. However, many attendees complained of traffic congestion and conflicts between automobiles, buses, and cyclists. These comments reflect a desire for faster, smoother flowing automobile service. Nevertheless, pedestrian safety was emphasized, particularly the need to direct pedestrians to designated street crossings.



### WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ALONG AVENT FERRY ROAD?



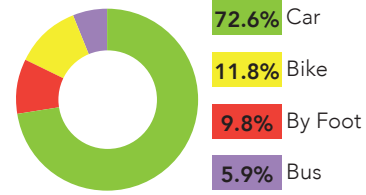
- The aging and dated building stock along the corridor were noted. Generally, attendees felt corridor vision should allow taller buildings with increased population density at Mission Valley Shopping Center, while protecting the character and feel of the tree-lined residential sections to the south. Some noted the primary uses should be focused on the University, while others desire to see the corridor expand to include a larger demographic cross-section.

## WHAT IS THE COOL STUFF YOU WANT TO KEEP ALONG AVENT FERRY ROAD?

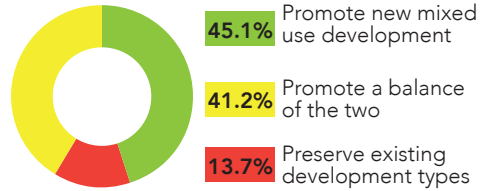




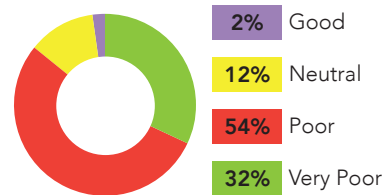
### My primary mode of travel along Avent Ferry Road is:



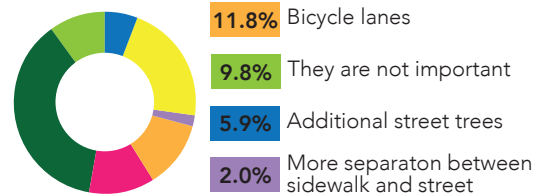
### The most important Land Use fix is:



### How would you rate the safety of Avent Ferry Road?



### The most important Public Realm / Streetscape fix is:



### Which objectives are the most important for the corridor (Choose top 3)

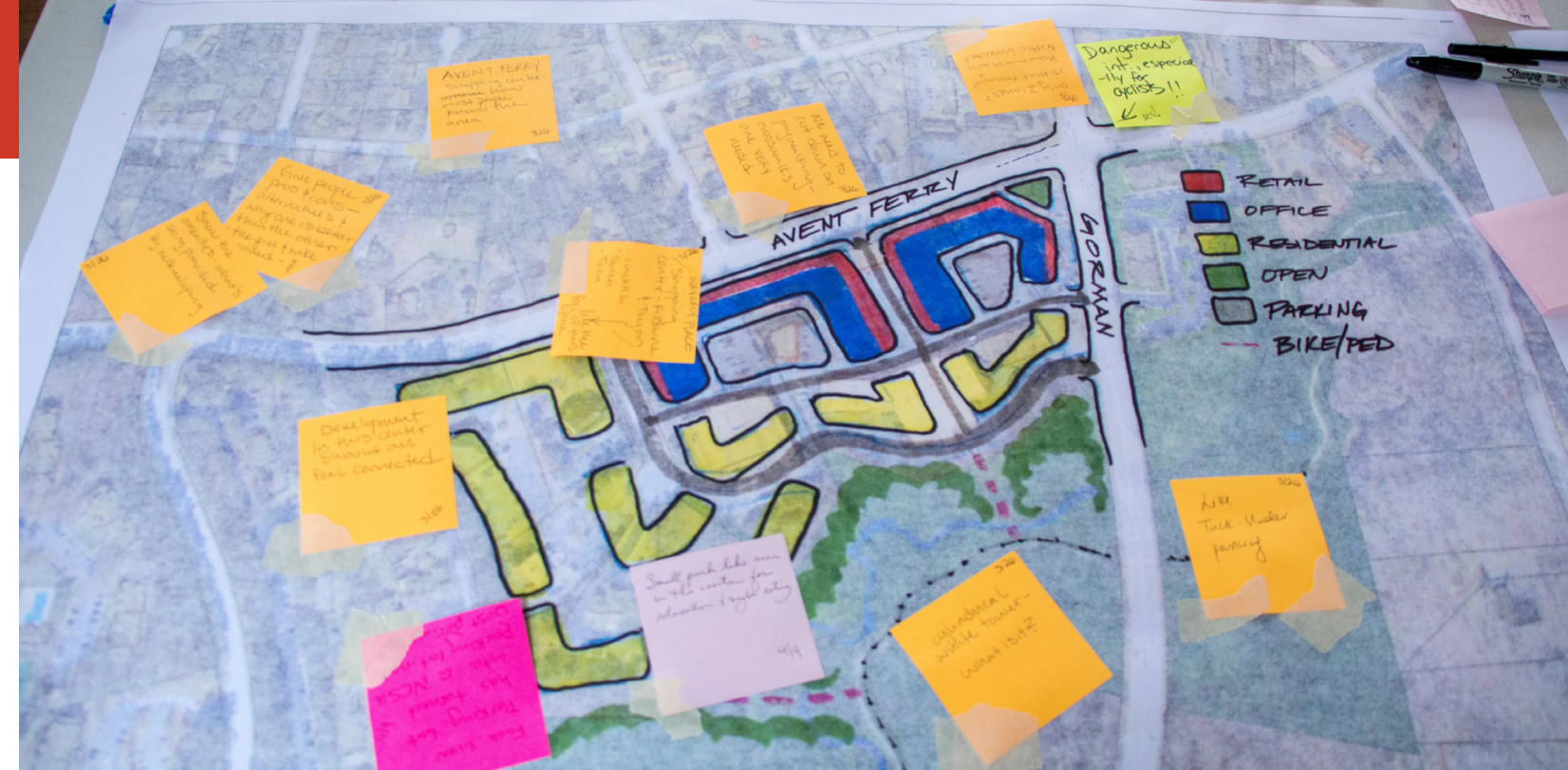
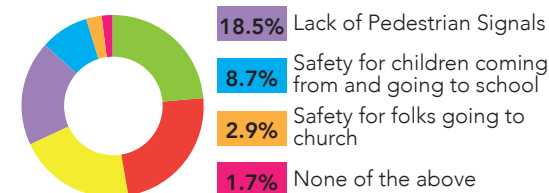


## Keypad and Online Polling

Online polling was utilized to reach a broader demographic than through public workshops alone. With greater flexibility for time and location, the community was invited to complete polls through the City website. Results include:

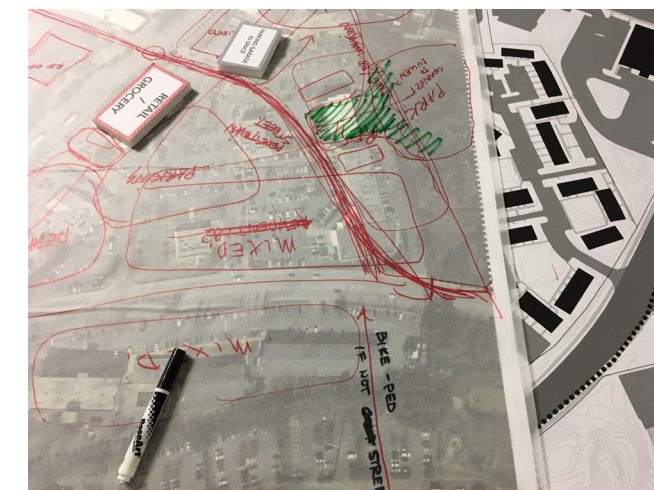
- A majority of respondents indicated they primarily access the corridor by automobile. Improvements in pedestrian and bicycle safety were the most important objectives.
- Respondents indicated additional important improvements should include enhanced bus stops, elimination of curb-cuts, additional medians, wider continuous sidewalks, and development of mixed-use projects.
- Online polling further indicated that the 25-year-old plus population is well and evenly represented. Unfortunately, despite outreach efforts, the 18 to 25-year-old demographic was underrepresented given that much of the housing in the corridor is occupied by largely transient college students and most of the retail and transit development serves this population. For future studies, we recommend additional alternative engagement tactics aimed at the 18 to 25 demographic, such as walk-up polling at retail centers and bus stops.

### What safety issues concern you most along Avent Ferry Road?



## Workshop Design Concepts

Early data collection and survey results identified the Mission Valley and Avent Ferry Shopping Centers as focus areas which will require detailed future study related to connectivity and land use. Several concepts were developed during the workshops to identify configurations of retail, office, and residential uses on these properties. The arrangement of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and vehicle lanes were also studied. The design team refined these concepts and presented findings for comment at the third public meeting. The final plans are illustrated later in this document. Overall findings are as follows:



- Locate buildings closer to the street and eliminate parking between buildings and street.
- Take advantage of site topography for building siting/layout to reduce the perceived building heights. Locate taller buildings on the downhill portion of sites. This is especially important at Avent Ferry Shopping Center where there is a strong desire to avoid tall buildings adjacent to residential neighborhoods.
- Provide easy bicycle and pedestrian connections to adjacent properties at each shopping center. At Mission Valley this should include Centennial Campus, Main Campus, student housing, and Nazareth Street. At Avent Ferry Road, this should include simple and safe crossings to the single- and multi-family residential neighborhoods as well as the greenway. This will help address the jaywalking issues along the corridor.
- Make sidewalks wide and provide ample space for streetscape amenities, outdoor dining, etc.
- Provide multiple, active public spaces at each development.



## Design Alternatives Meeting

"We want to take only the best of the current trends in urban design: more walking, more biking, more transit, and more nature."

In March of 2018, a public meeting was held to review prepared design based on public input from previous meetings and workshops, as well as from City of Raleigh Staff input. The record of input received at the Design Alternatives Meeting may be accessed via the UDC web site and in the appendix of this document. Data and user opinions were collected through a variety of methods including written comments, instant polling, issue-oriented table discussions, and review of alternative street cross-sections.

### Highlights of the workshop and meeting include:

#### Redevelopment

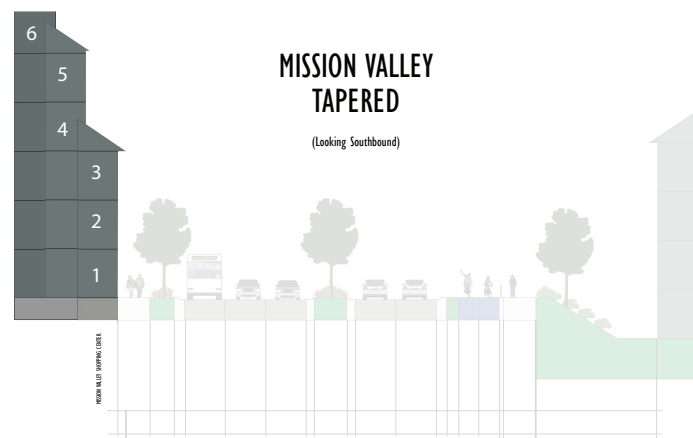
*"vibrancy without noise, traffic, and difficult parking."*

Participants preferred redevelopment that retains a diversity of stores, preserving small businesses that serve diverse neighborhoods, both culturally and economically. Many participants feel it's important to maintain "the feel and character" of Raleigh as Raleigh continues to grow. Many agreed additional density with combined residential and retail, and continuing to provide student housing is preferable at Mission Valley. Reducing "the sea of parking" is mentioned, though others request that parking should be readily available for public use. Generally, the feeling was that the existing shopping centers were in need of updating.

One community member expressed concern over the possible economic impact to residents: "the changes could price out current residents, particularly renters."

#### Building Height

There was wide opinion regarding the limitation of building heights. Many participants wanted to densify the Corridor in general, while many wanted to maintain building heights between 3 and 5 stories. People want buildings set back "as far from the street as possible" to preserve a green corridor to Lake Johnson and to allow plenty of light on sidewalks and bike paths. "Why propose buildings within the minimum setbacks?"



Example alternatives for Mission Valley's building height used during the Design Alternative meeting and survey

#### Connectivity

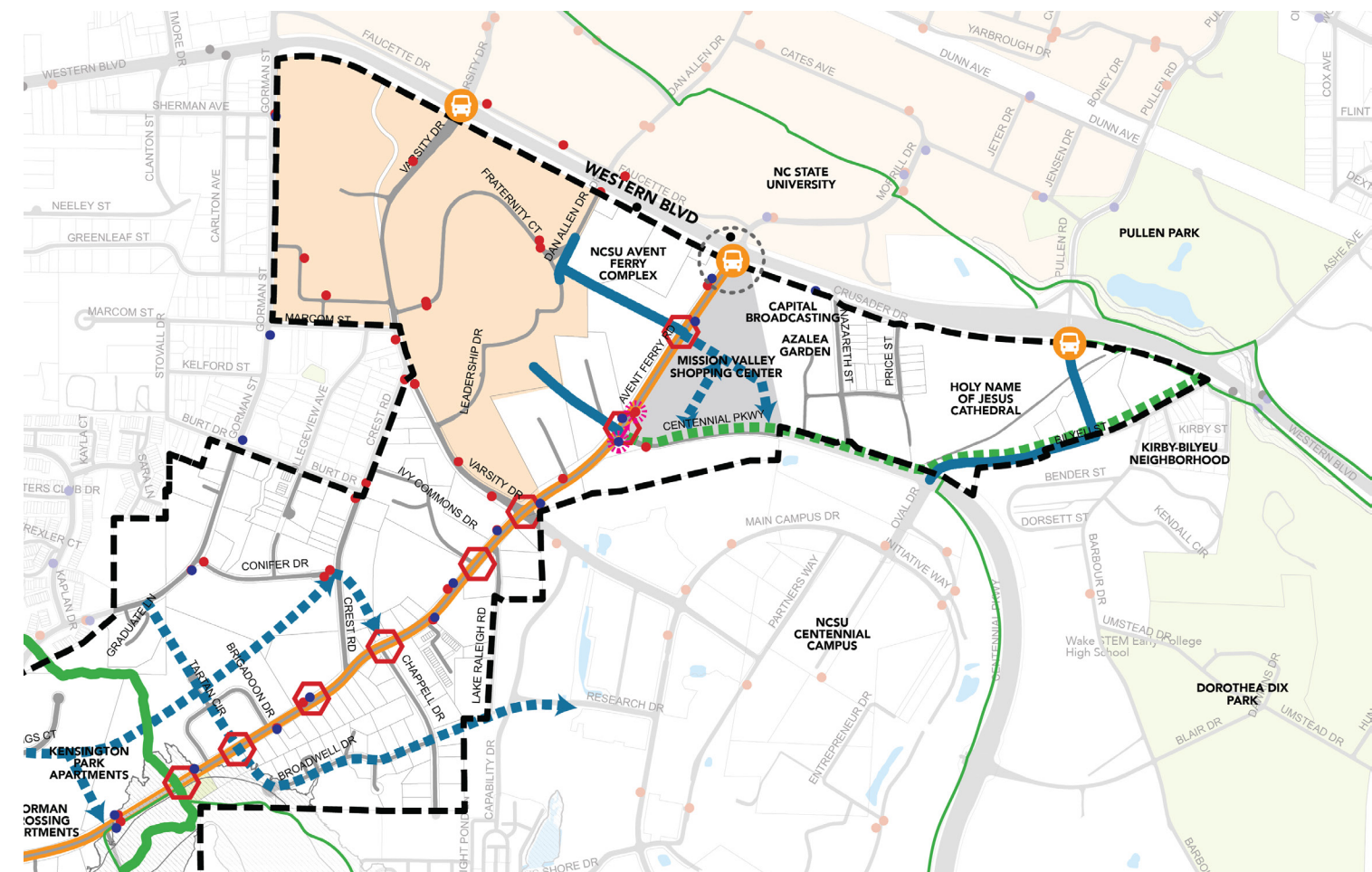
*"[I] like that connectivity will be improved between currently disjointed neighborhoods."*

Improvements to benefit public transit, bikes, pedestrians, and greenway users are all heavily and repeatedly emphasized in the public forums. Participants saw the corridor as a network for multimodal access requiring additional safety measures and uninterrupted connections "to create [a] holistic system that is safe and desirable."

Many people mention the need for suitable crosswalks and pedestrian corridor along Avent Ferry Road as it is perceived to be very difficult to safely cross from one side of the street to

the other. Many people suggest renovating the corridor as if it is primarily a "pedestrian corridor"

Improved connection to Raleigh greenway network was highly valued. The proposed greenway additions and extensions were whole-heartedly supported and additional expansion was requested. Specific greenway connections mentioned include an elevated crossing over Walnut Creek at Gorman Street, from Campus Shore Dr. northbound to Varsity Drive, and between Avent Ferry and Centennial Campus and Dorothea Dix Park







## Transportation and Traffic

*"The biggest problems are buses blocking whole lanes of traffic when they stop, and pedestrians have a hard time crossing AF."*

Reconciling flow and conflict between pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles—particularly given increase in development—is a recurring concern. Participants shared concerns with inadequate traffic lights, bus stops, and crosswalks, and all want more and improved access for pedestrians and bicycles. There is concern that two lanes are not enough given increasing development and population and complaints about cars stacking behind stopped buses at bus stops.

In discussions on regulating bicycle circulation, there was larger support for bicycle tracks on either side. Participants did request improved separation between bicycles and cars through structural dividers.

There was concern about widening the street over Lake Johnson. Increased street surface was seen as a detriment to the natural character of Lake Johnson. One participant stated, "Lake Johnson should be 'protected from traffic.'"

Additionally, community members requested improvements for vehicles and pedestrians at the entrance to the Lake Johnson Recreation Area.

## Stormwater and Green Infrastructure

*"We want to see responsible development for a change: rain gardens in medians and parking areas, pervious pavement, etc. Over-development will impact existing flooding problems."*

Many comments pertained to wetlands, flooding, and poor stormwater treatment. Participants expressed interest in visible, above-ground stormwater detention and treatment through use of rain gardens and "cutting-edge stormwater management." Goals included ameliorating toxic runoff, reducing flooding, and bringing greater connection to, and increasing public awareness with natural systems.

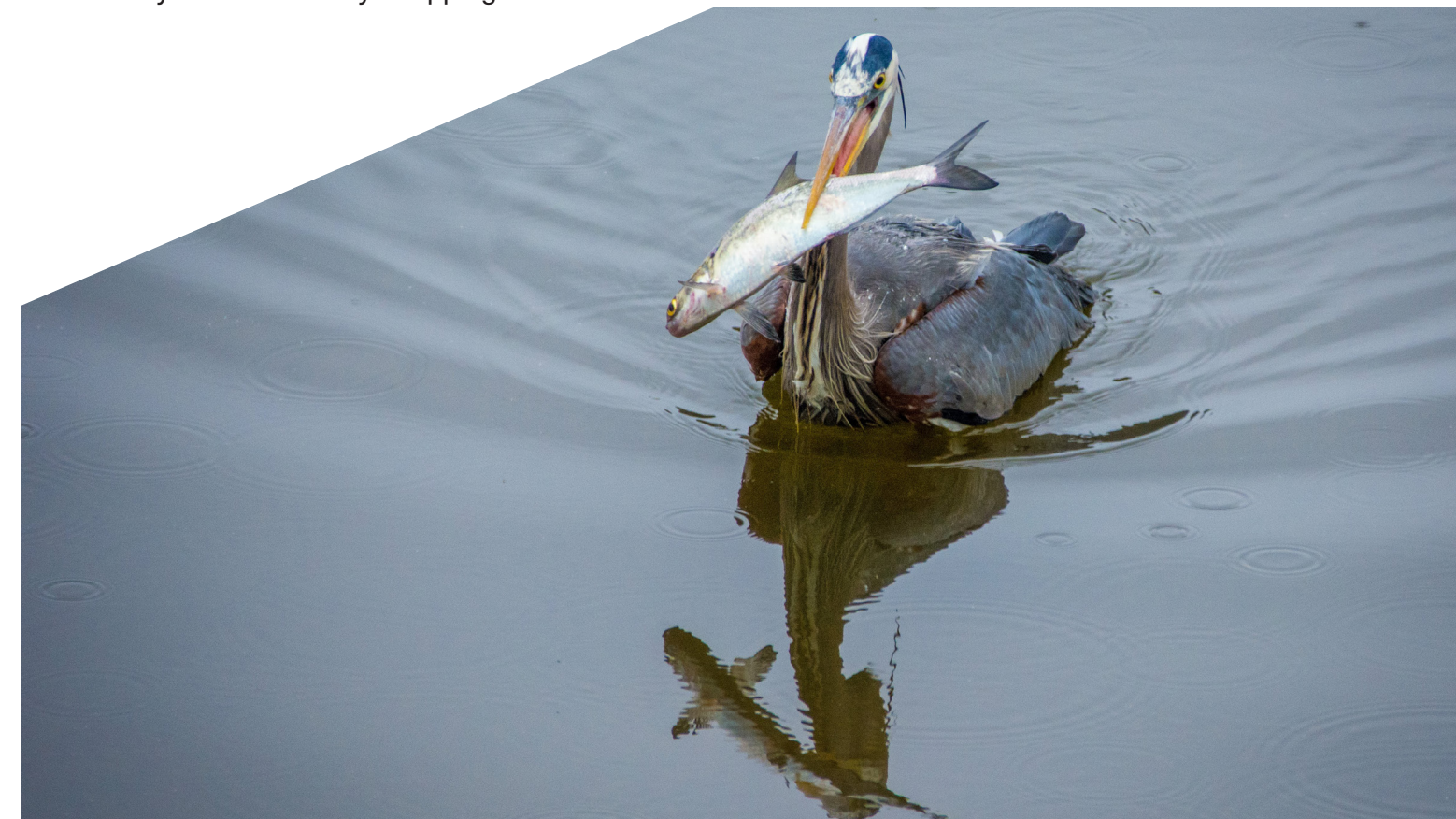


An example of green infrastructure implemented within the median

## Green Space

*"A strong green corridor is very appealing."*

In addition to the desire to improve connection to the Raleigh greenway system, participants want to see additional park and recreation spaces along the corridor. Specific locations mentioned were at Lake Raleigh, at greenway intersections, and in the center of Mission Valley and Avent Ferry Shopping Centers.





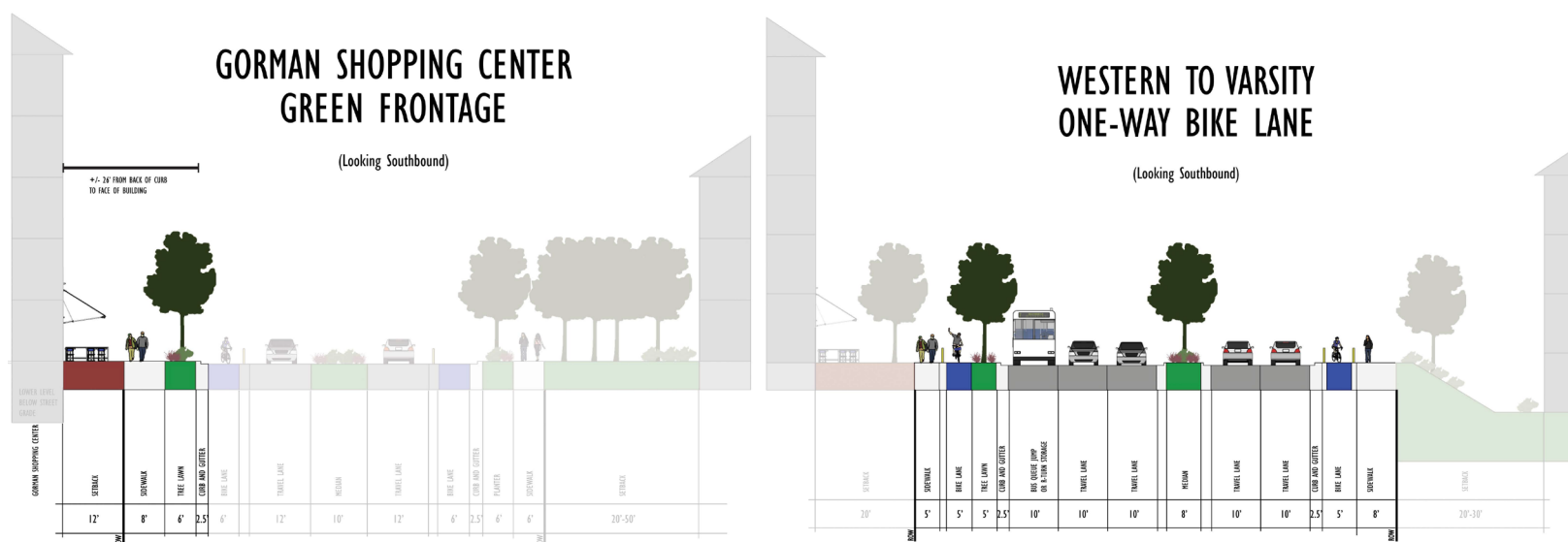
## 2018 Online Polling Website Results

In April 2018, the Avenet Ferry Road Corridor Study Online Forum also was made available to citizens who were unable to attend the in-person visioning sessions. The public was invited to respond to key questions regarding salient features of the proposed corridor renovation, as well as options pertaining to the corridor's potential use and vision. Many of the opinions gathered through this medium echoed those voiced at workshops. (Source material is available in the APPENDIX.)

## Building Height at Mission Valley Shopping Center

42% of participants preferred building height at Mission Valley Shopping Center be tapered from 3 to 7 stories. Some participants said the project is an ideal opportunity for densification.

"This is an ideal location for additional density. Developing to at least seven stories creates the best opportunity to capitalize on our transit investments. Combining additional density with transit connections provides the best opportunity to create a livable, sustainable place."



## Frontage Typology

*"We need...more space for plantings, more space for trees."*

83% of participants preferred "Green" building farther from the street with landscaping, while 18% preferred "Urban" building close to the street.

In a strong majority, respondents preferred buildings set further back from the street with space for dining and sitting along with wide sidewalks. Frequently repeated was a desire for this broad frontage to be openly accessible to the public and vegetated.

"A zone between the buildings and the street that can accommodate dining, pocket parks, or other amenities is needed to make walking or biking on Avent Ferry Road a pleasant experience."

## Building Height at Avent Ferry Road and Avent Ferry Shopping Center

*"I'd love to see things like more...café tables, a coffee shop, greenery, little local dive bar/ lounge, more grass plots where pop-up markets, etc. can happen. Most importantly - ease of access and walkability to this center. I've seen neighborhoods near Asheville completely transform in this way as Asheville started to grow. And Raleigh as we know, is taking off."*

42% of participants preferred building height be tapered from 3 to 5 stories; 34% prefer three stories, and 13% prefer more than five stories.

The intersection with Gorman Street brought varied response to building height but included broad consensus that the center could be better designed and better utilized. Responses included those preferring very tall buildings and lower density mid-rise development with ground level retail. One participant voiced great dismay that Avent Ferry may follow similar development patterns as Cameron Village, “Do we really need to shove in more over-priced apartments and condos?”

## Street Section from Western Boulevard to Varsity Drive

72% of participants preferred a one-way bike lane on each side of the street, while 29% preferred a two-way bike lane on the south-bound side.

While some respondents saw two-way bike lanes as a way to “clearly prioritize bike traffic,” others found them confusing and potentially dangerous.

## Street Section from Varsity Drive to Gorman Street

62% participants preferred a smaller median with the bike lane separated from the sidewalk with a tree planting strip; 39% of those who participated preferred a larger median with tree with the bike lane separated from the sidewalk with bollards.

Responding comments reinforced the value of trees for separation between people on foot, people on bikes, and cars. Increased separation is seen to increase feelings of safety and controlling pedestrian intrusion onto bike lanes.





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